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AUTHOR Westerfield, Kay
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ABSTRACT

Adjustments to the case study approach are recommended to address three major areas of difficulty for foreign students in master's-level marketing education programs: (1) language-related problems; (2) unfamiliar class format and methodology; and (3) lack of cultural background knowledge. For language-related problems, case studies are a good basis for adding topical supplemental readings from textbooks and business journals. However, teachers need to be aware that use of metaphors in marketing is a particularly difficult area for non-native speakers, and the conventions governing student-teacher classroom interaction may be unknown to the student, inhibiting participation. A possible sequence of case study topics includes consumer behavior, market research and segmentation, and marketing mix. (Two videotapes are recommended.) Foreign students may not understand the concept of case studies, that there is no right or wrong answer to a problem, but that the case can be used to discuss effective and ineffective handling of a situation. Participation and grading expectations should also be openly explained. Foreign students' familiarity with well-known U.S. companies can be increased through supplementary texts and an author-produced listing of firms, with notes on their corporate images. (MSE)

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ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR INTERNATIONAL PRE-MBA'S IN MARKETING

Kay Westerfield
PLC 241
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403

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EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

FOR WORLD BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONS

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ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR INTERNATIONAL PRE-MBA'S IN MARKETING

Kay Westerfield
American English Institute
University of Oregon

First-year international business students face overwhelming challenges in regard to course content and class format. This ESP course is designed to help students meet those challenges in the content area of Marketing.

There seem to be three potential problem areas for NNS students:

I. Problems related to language.

1. Students are required to read lengthy texts, which may include journal articles, case studies, and chapters from Business textbooks.

2. Writing tasks range from essay exam questions to concise, to-the-point analyses of cases to 20-page group projects.

(MBA professors report that NNS students manage to keep up with their reading and do fine in their written work. The problems lie in the other two language skills areas:)

3. Listening comprehension of class discussions and lectures.

4. Speaking - participating actively themselves in those class discussions and other small-group discussions.

The Case Study Solution.

To deal with these language-related problems, case studies serve as a good base which can be supplemented by additional readings from textbooks and business journals/magazines.

1. Rationale: The case study method, which is an integral part of MBA programs, poses particular problems for incoming international students in terms of its receptive and productive skill requirements. Students are not only required to read a lengthy case text full of new vocabulary and idioms and often to prepare a written analysis, but they are also required to engage in a serious debate of the case with other students, and it is here, as I mentioned before, where the problems often arise. NNS students attribute their difficulty in participating in class discussions to problems with

general listening comprehension (not understanding the teacher or other students), unusual business vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, and unfamiliarity with the cultural/sociolinguistic rules of group discussion in business classes.

The papers listed in your handout give a lot of suggestions on how to work with cases in the ESP classroom to improve students' linguistic accuracy, i.e. their knowledge of vocabulary, structure, and pronounciation, and their linguistic fluency, the ability to participate successfully in small-group discussions.

In addition to this, however, I feel we need to prepare students for the spontaneous language that arises in lectures and in class discussions of cases. Marketing classes, in particular, seem especially rich in the area of metaphor, depending to some extent, of course, upon the nature of the instructor. There tends to be a high frequency of sport and military expressions - clearly due to the competitive nature of marketing - as well as animal metaphors. Some of these metaphors which are business-specific, such as a "cash cow" or a "dog", may be defined in the course textbooks and, therefore, may not be as problematic. The sport and military metaphors that extend across disciplines and come up spontaneously in class are not defined, however, and may be quite problematic. Expressions, such as these, should be consciously worked into ESP class discussions. (In your handout, I've included a sampling of some of the most common ones, taken from MBA Marketing classes, which I use in our case discussions.)

Another reason that international students may have difficulty participating in class discussions of case studies is because they are not familiar with the sociolinguistic rules governing student/teacher and student/student interaction in that situation. Videotapes of Marketing classes engaged in lively discussions provide a model for students to study the discourse of large-group interactions: turn-taking, the timing of responses, the specific gambits used, the "devil's advocate" ploy of the instructor, and the acceptability of questioning or disagreeing with him/her. The MBA program at your school may have videotapes of Marketing classes already available so that you don't have to go to the trouble of making the arrangements and videotaping your own.

Using cases in an ESP-Marketing course prepares students for the linguistic challenges in their future MBA programs. Students get practice at reading and analyzing cases and in participating effectively in the oral treatment of a case in class and small-group discussions.

Texts listed in handout contain both domestic and international cases of reasonable length for pre-MBA students.

A possible sequence of topics for a Marketing class.

1. Consumer Behavior - understanding the factors that affect buying decisions

2. Market Research and Market Segmentation - gathering the information about

customers needed to make successful marketing decisions

3. Marketing Mix - "The 4 P's": Product, Place, Promotion, Price

(The 2 Marketing texts by Pride & Ferrel and Kurtz & Boone, listed in your handout, are organized in this way and each chapter contains short case studies about well-known companines which allow students to apply what they have just learned. Teacher guides are also available.)

In addition, I would like to mention two video case studies used in MBA programs that offer a good opportunity for students to bring together and apply what they have learned in regard to marketing strategy. These video cases, which are listed in your handout as part of the Enterprise Series, focus on successful and unsuccessful marketing mix strategies on domestic and international scenes. The Levi Strauss case, "Not By Jeans Alone", lets students analyze what went wrong in Levi's marketing strategy for their new product and the Kentucky Fried Chicken case, "The Colonel Goes to Japan", shows how the company successfully adapted their marketing mix for a foreign market. I've included a sample integrated skills follow-up exercise for the Levi case that allows students to apply their marketing knowledge. (Handout)

II. Class Format/Methodology

The second problematic area for international students is related to class format and methodology. An important point to mention when preparing students for the business school approach to case studies is that there is no "right" answer, though several might be "preferable". Cases are meant to be used as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a situation. Many of our international students have problems with this ambiguity - the absence of 1 right answer. It goes against their previous classroom experience.

In addition, students don't know what will expected of them in their marketing classes or how they will be graded. Testing may be different from in their native country - there is not just one big test at the end of the year and blue books are used. Evaluation criteria for written assignments may be different from what is expected. Students need to be encouraged and told how to approach faculty outside of the classroom for advice on their course work. Sample syllabuses from different marketing classes can be helpful for students.

III. Cultural Background Knowledge

A third problematic area for international students is related to a lack of cultural-background knowledge. Certain American companies, famous CEO's, and well-known products, repeatedly referred to in Marketing courses, are part of the basic cultural knowledge of most American students, but may be unfamiliar to first-year international students with a different cultural database. In order to narrow this information gap of our business students, I compiled a list of the most well-known (successful in their field) companies, taken from Fortune, and their product category and asked MBA professors to comment on the companies' corporate image. The results of this survey are on page ____ of your handout. This can be used to increase students' familiarity with major U.S. companies, but it doesn't touch on the cultural values that underlie American business. Case studies can do that to some extent, but need

to be supplemented with other materials. I would like to mention two books that touches on business values. The first is The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America; it contains brief profiles of leading American companies, including Wal-Mart, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, People Express, Levi Strauss, etc., which can be used in combination with marketing case studies on those companies. You can also choose companies from your particular geographic area, if you like. In the Northwest, we look at companies, such as Weyerhaeuser, Tektronix, and Nordstrom's. Another text that touches on business values is The Manager's Bookshelf. It includes reviews of books, including Lee Iacoca's autobiography and William Ouchi's Theory Z. And, of course, another good source of materials for cultural training are the business magazines, such as Business Week, Fortune, and Advertising Age.

IV. Conclusion.

Academic preparation for international pre-MBA students should include training in these three problem areas: language (including both receptive and productive skills), class format/methodology, and cultural values. With proper training, students will be able to meet the challenges in the MBA classes.